

政府總部
香港下亞厘畢道



GOVERNMENT SECRETARIAT
LOWER ALBERT ROAD
HONG KONG

Our Ref. : SBCR 1/2366/08
Your Ref. : CB(3)/PAC/R51

Tel. No.: 2810 2766
Fax No.: 2868 9159

28 February 2009

Ms Miranda HON
Clerk, Public Accounts Committee
Legislative Council
Legislative Council Building
8 Jackson Road
Central
Hong Kong

Dear Ms Hon,

**The Director of Audit's Report on the
results of value for money audits (Report No.51)**

Emergency ambulance service (Chapter 4)

Thank you for your letter dated 16 January 2009. My response to the specific questions raised in your letter is set out in the following paragraphs.

(a) 2004 RAE

In 2004, having regard to budgetary considerations, the Financial Services and Treasury Bureau (FSTB) only invited new bids from bureaux/departments for additional resources for Capital Works and Capital Non-works expenditure, but not for recurrent expenditure. Accordingly, the Fire Services Department (FSD) submitted a bid in 2004 for the procurement of seven additional town ambulances (TAs) for maintenance reserve and four replacement village ambulances (VAs). Of these, the Security Bureau (SB) supported the procurement of four TAs and one replacement VA. SB supported four additional TAs in view of the fact that FSD had more than 230 TAs in hand at the time of application. It was considered that the procurement of four TAs would be sufficient to meet

FSD's maintenance reserve requirement. Of the four VAs that FSD proposed for replacement, all of them had a relatively high availability rate and only one of them was assessed by FSD to have poor condition. As a result, SB supported the replacement of one VA to maintain operational efficiency.

FSD's bid and SB's recommendation were processed by FSTB. Funding for one replacement VA was approved. FSTB decided to reject the funding requirement for any TAs after consulting the Government Logistics Department (GLD); the latter was of the view that FSD would have about 40 new TAs delivered in end September 2004 and the availability of TAs would be enhanced when the new TAs were put into service.

(b) Minimum Cost Refurbishment Programme (MCRP)

FSD joined the MCRP in April 2006 for the refurbishment of a total of 10 TAs. In fact, the ten TAs proposed for refurbishment under the MCRP had been approved for replacement in the 2002 RAE and were actually replaced by new TAs between October 2004 and January 2006. Had these ten TAs not undergone refurbishment, they would have been disposed of by GLD in accordance with established procedures.

Therefore, FSD proposed to refurbish and retain the ten TAs as a temporary measure to enhance ambulance availability on a need basis. They were not intended for active emergency ambulance service. In 2006, there was no need to reactivate any refurbished TAs for active service. The response time performance of ambulance service in that year was 92.7%, which was above the Department's pledge of 92.5%. Also, as a result of the 2005 and 2006 RAEs, FSD had obtained funding for the replacement of another 35 TAs.

In late 2007, whilst the procurement of the 35 replacement TAs approved in the 2005 and 2006 RAEs was still in progress, it became clear that the new vehicles would not be fully delivered until the first quarter of 2009. FSD saw the need to reactivate the refurbished TAs in batches on a need basis. In September 2007, the first two refurbished vehicles were reactivated. By the time the Director of Audit finalised his Report No.51 in mid-2008, eight TAs had been reactivated. The last two were reactivated in August 2008. That being the case, the situation will improve substantially when all 35 new TAs should be delivered by March 2009. Furthermore, funding has been approved in the 2007 and 2008

RAEs for the replacement of another 161 ambulances, of which 65 will be available for service before the end of 2009 and the remaining 96 within the first half of 2010.

(c) FSD's bids for additional staff as reserve in the 2006 and 2007 RAEs

In its bid for additional staff for reserve in the 2007 RAE, FSD quoted a recommendation of the Committee for the Review on Paramedic Ambulance Service (Review Committee), but not in its earlier bid in the 2006 RAE. Having said that, it should be noted that the Review, conducted in 2000, was about the training of Senior Ambulancemen and Principal Ambulancemen for paramedic service as Emergency Medical Assistants II (EMA IIs). It recommended the establishment of a reserve pool to facilitate the release of staff to receive paramedic training. The matter had been dealt with in the 2001 and 2007 RAEs. In the 2001 RAE, 50 time-limited posts were approved for creation for a three-year period from April 2002 to March 2005 so as to allow FSD to train an additional 550 EMA IIs. Together with the EMA IIs already in service, the special training reserve arrangement enabled about 800 EMA IIs in total for the full implementation of paramedic ambulance service by 2005.

A review was conducted in 2004 to assess the need for extension of the time-limited posts. It was noted that these time-limited posts were effective in relieving staff to receive paramedic training and increasing the number of EMA IIs in FSD. In fact, by September 2004, FSD had already trained over 520 additional EMA IIs, bringing the total of EMA IIs in service to about 770. This represented an achievement of over 95% of its original target and it was certain that by the time the special training service arrangement ended in 2005, FSD should be more than able to meet its target of attaining about 800 EMA IIs in total. This notwithstanding, it was decided in late 2004 that 15 time-limited posts should be retained for another three years starting April 2005 to enhance FSD's capacity to provide paramedic training. In the event, these 15 time-limited posts were further approved for creation on a permanent basis in the 2007 RAE.

It is clear from the above that the recommendation of the Review Committee for the establishment of a reserve pool to facilitate the release of staff to receive paramedic training had been addressed effectively in the 2001 and 2007 RAEs. Funding support was given to implement the recommendation in full because paramedic training was considered as a major upgrade of the skills of the staff and hence standard of emergency ambulance services for the public. Nevertheless, the provision of

additional posts as reserve to meet ongoing training needs would usually not be accorded priority, having regard to the great number of competing bids each year for priority service commitments or new initiatives.

(d) Breakdown records of the 10 ambulances not supported for replacement in the 2006 RAE

In the 2006 RAE, FSD requested 36 replacement TAs and SB supported 26 of them. The remaining 10 TAs proposed for replacement were observed to yield a relatively high availability rate of around 90% at the time of application. Furthermore, FSD had 10 TAs refurbished under the MCRP at that time that could be deployed on a need basis. The availability rate and breakdown record of the ten TAs not supported for replacement in the 2006 RAEs are at Annex A.

Members did not raise any questions in respect of the 2007 RAE, but Members may wish to note that funding was approved for the replacement of 88 TAs in 2007. As regards the 2008 RAE, FSD proposed to replace another 73 TAs. SB supported all 73 replacement TAs and FSTB approved SB's recommendation in its entirety. Of the 73 TAs proposed for replacement in the 2008 RAE, ten were previously included in FSD's bid in the 2006 RAE. As requested by Members, the availability rate and breakdown record of these ten TAs are at Annex B.

It should be noted that the ambulances in Annex A and Annex B are not entirely the same and cannot be compared directly. This is because the list of TAs proposed for replacement in each RAE was drawn up by FSD on the advice of GLD and the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department, taking into account the prevailing condition of the vehicles at the time. In this regard, it might contain vehicles that were previously supported for replacement but had not actually been replaced due to operational reasons, e.g. the need to urgently replace some other TAs first owing to their poor condition after traffic accidents.

We note that the Director of Audit recommended in his Report No.51 that FSD should introduce measures to ensure that all ambulances due for replacement, including those rejected in the previous RAE, are recommended for replacement in the annual RAE. FSD agrees with this recommendation and will ensure that all TAs rejected in the previous RAE are included in the bid of the annual RAE. To facilitate the submission of bids by FSD in future exercises, SB and FSTB will specify the TAs not

supported for replacement, so that FSD can take them into account when preparing the list of proposed replacement in the subsequent year.

Yours sincerely,



**(Ms Carol Yuen)
for Secretary for Security**

c.c. Director of Audit	(Fax No. 2583 9063)
Secretary for Financial Services and Treasury	(Fax No. 2537 1736)
Director of Fire Services	(Fax No. 2368 0175)
Director of Government Logistics	(Fax No. 2510 7904)
Director of Electrical and Mechanical Services	(Fax No. 2890 7493)

Annex A

The availability rate and downtime record of the ten ambulances not supported for replacement in the 2006 Capital Non-works RAE

Ambulance No.	2006 RAE	
	Availability Rate (%) (June 05 - May 06)	Downtime (%) (June 05 - May 06)
AM5024 *	91.5	8.5
AM5040 *	90.4	9.6
AM5051 ^	93.4	6.6
AM5067 ^	92.3	7.7
AM5284 *	91.5	8.5
AM5294 ^	89.9	10.1
AM5323 *	92.6	7.4
AM5326 *	92.9	7.1
AM5333 *	89.6	10.4
AM5339 *	91.0	9.0

*According to our record, these ambulances were not included in the 2007 and 2008 Capital Non-works RAE.

^ These ambulances were not included in the 2007 Capital Non-works RAE but were re-submitted in the 2008 Capital Non-works RAE.

Annex B

The availability rate and downtime record of the ten ambulances that had been submitted in 2008 and were previously included in the 2006 Capital Non-works RAE

Ambulance No.	2008 RAE	
	Availability Rate (%) (2007)	Downtime (%) (2007)
AM5051	94.5	5.5
AM5067	94.0	6.0
AM5294	93.2	6.8
AM5300 #	74.8	25.2
AM5301 #	96.1	3.9
AM5308 #	88.5	11.5
AM5314 #	93.7	6.3
AM5332 #	89.9	10.1
AM5341 #	92.9	7.1
AM5343 #	57.9	42.1

These ambulances were supported for replacement in the 2006 RAE